

Postscripts

by JACK POST

Half a century ago, the hill where we live lay bare in the summer sun, treeless, with open fields running down to the marsh and the waving sedgegrass, a part of the Hall Farm on Bay Rd., the perfect spot for a house, which would face across Morton's Hole toward Captain's Hill, looking up at the old Pilgrim soldier standing resolutely on his pedestal, facing east toward the England that he and the other Saints had put behind them 300 years ago.

Geneva Simmons and her doctor husband bought the hill from old Charlie Hall, and in 1926 began to plan a house. She wrote years later: "A Cape Cod cottage was plainly suited to the place, and it should be an old one (if the price were not prohibitive) that could be moved and established on new foundations on our knoll. An advertisement in the paper led us to Plympton, where we looked at the wreck of a house that had been a home for at least 200 years. Could anything be made of these ruins, of broken and missing windows, of doors swinging in the wind, of a porch fallen in and open to every storm?"

Yet the sound simplicity of a sturdy Cape remained; so the Simmons family decided to try to salvage what they could. The lines were there, and enough of the basic frame, so that they felt sure the house could be reproduced on the Duxbury site. As the afternoon cast lengthening shadows over the collapsed gray roof, an image of the house that could rise on the hill became the substance of their dream.

From the cellar hole in Plympton, the massive handhewn blocks of granite were hauled to be set in the new foundation. From carefully noted dimensions, the solid pine beams were raised, first a frame, then roof rafters, all constructed around a central chimney of new bricks, but with the hearth laid from mellowed old bricks carried over from Plympton. Soon the weathered, small-paned windows were being set on either side of the outside doors in conformance to traditional style. Two handsome panelled doors for the interior, bid in at an auction, were stripped, repainted, and hung on their original H and L hinges.

From a truly ancient house in Abington was acquired even older

panelling to surround the living room fireplace, complete with a pair of cupboards with panelled doors to be set on either side of the chimney. Everything that could be saved from the old house at Plympton was brought over to the hill at Duxbury, the stone, the beams, the windows and doors, the hardware, even the hand-wrought nails. When nothing more could be gleaned from the wreckage, suitable substitutes were bought at auctions or picked up from abandoned outbuildings on old farms of the neighborhood, until at last the house stood reconstructed, all of early materials, to look just as it must have 200 years before.

The Simmons boys grew up in the place, had their clubhouse in the attic over the barn turned garage, eventually married and moved away. As always happens, time moved relentlessly along, forcing the Simmons family first to rent, then to sell their cherished home. We moved in, unfettered by earlier conceptions, and began to make changes.

Eight feet added to the north side of the house widened the master bedroom and provided closet space, a dressing room and bath. The narrow screened porch darkening the kitchen was ripped off, a broad stone-tiled patio room added where the porch had been, and a brick terrace constructed beyond, out over the brow of the hill. Inside, the tongue-and-grooved kitchen ceiling boards came down to reveal pitched rafters above and form a spacious work area which we surrounded with natural cabinets, a pleasant room separated from the terrace only by sliding glass. We could stand there looking out over the trees, past the Nook toward Plymouth Bay, where in the distant haze the Mayflower must be lying.

The house approached its final stage with the addition of 2 work rooms beyond the kitchen wing, one above the other, equipped with desks, typewriters, files and bookshelves. There anyone could concentrate in happy seclusion, undisturbed by anything but the beauty of the hillside and the glittering bay beyond, in a house old but new, picturesque but comfortable.